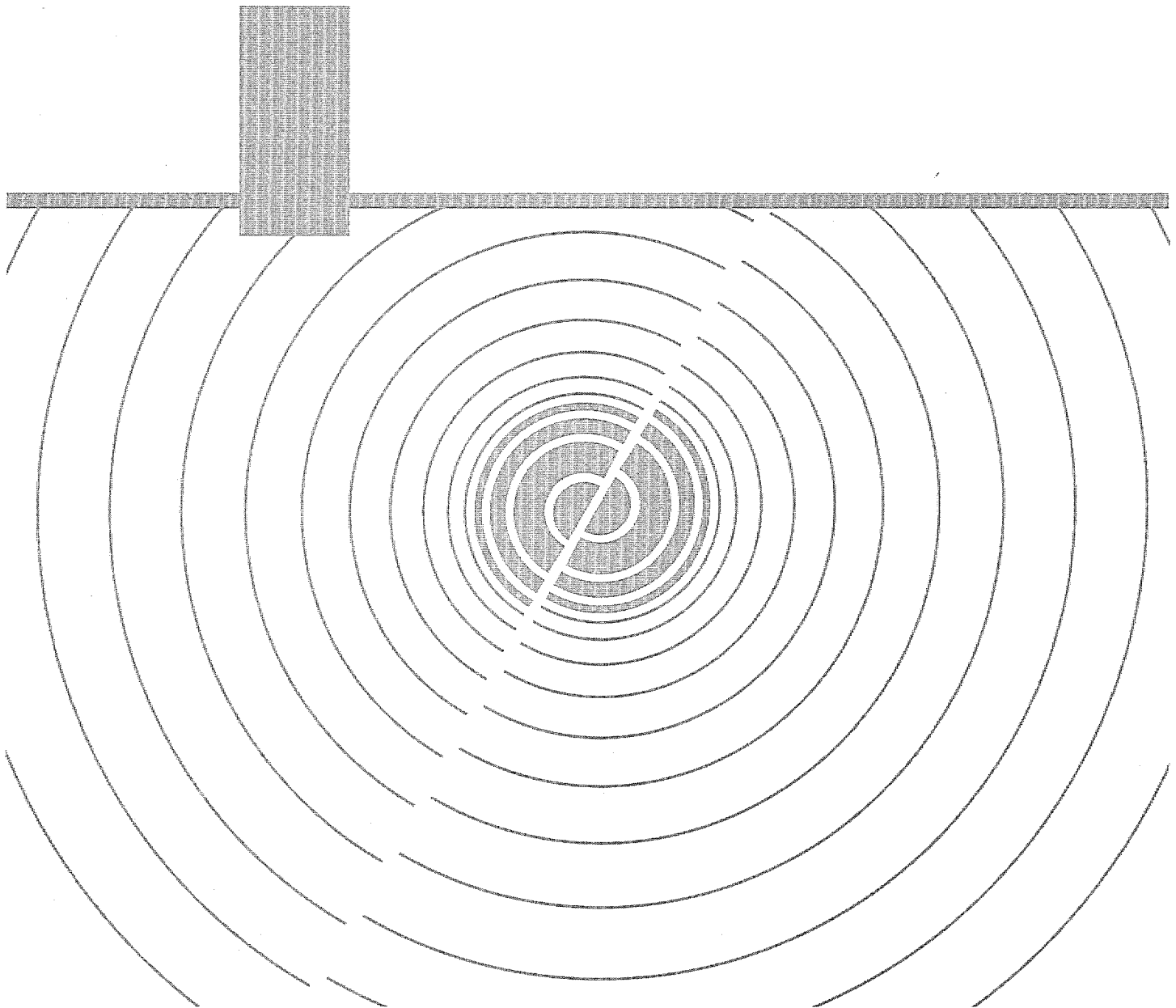


Appendix H:
Sample Press Releases



Appendix H

Sample Press Releases

The Role of News Coverage and How To Get It

Material in this appendix is intended to aid in efforts to promote awareness of earthquake risk and the adoption of the latest building codes. In the effort to educate the public and public officials, the news media can play an important part - maybe even a leading part. To use the media effectively, however, you must be ready to seek out the media, then be prepared if and when they begin to pay attention.

Do not expect reporters, editors, and news directors to find the story for themselves. Expect that you will have to "sell" them on why it is important to the community and their readers. At the same time, be careful not to hype something far beyond its importance; reporters and editors often will see through that. Be ready to back up your claims with facts and expertise.

Many times people dealing with the news media for the first time do not take into account how easily information can be miscommunicated or misunderstood. In your news releases or interviews, take extra care to be sure your major points are clear. Try to get the essential message and facts on paper, either in a news release or in a fact sheet you give to the reporter when meeting for an interview.

In interviews, don't be afraid to repeat your major points and to check and double-check that the reporter has understood the facts. This is especially important in talking about earthquakes, where information about fault zones, degree of risk (be careful using percentages), and the severity of quakes can be easily misconstrued.

Many times with news coverage, the timing is everything. In dealing with earthquake risk, probably the single best time to get the news media's attention is immediately after a major earthquake. The more serious the quake or the closer to your area, the better your opportunity for getting attention. A minor quake, actually felt by the residents in your area, also can be an opportunity.

Editors and news directors often are looking for the "local angle" on current news. If you can tell them why, after a major quake somewhere in the world, it is important to be concerned about earthquakes locally, you are almost assured of coverage. Since this opportunity is so important, and since an earthquake gives no warning, it is important to always be ready. You should have most of a news release already written, containing all the relevant local information, with only the first few sentences left to write when the major event occurs. Those first sentences will be the "hook," used to relate how your information is relevant to the current news and to area residents.

Among other opportunities for getting attention, some of which are anticipated in the attached materials:

- The launching of a statewide or regional effort to promote awareness of earthquake risk and adoption of the latest building codes.
- The anniversary of the Northridge (Los Angeles) and Kobe, Japan, earthquakes. They occurred on the same day, Jan. 17, in 1994 and 1995, respectively.

- When building codes or building code enforcement becomes a topic of serious discussion in city council or other public meetings.
- When emergency preparedness becomes an issue, even if resulting from other kinds of events, such as tornadoes or hurricanes.

Sample Press Releases

This appendix contains: (a) a sample release based on a fictional earthquake, (b) two versions of a "universal" release, designed to raise community awareness and/or announce plans for a campaign to adopt seismic codes; and (c) a sample letter to the editor. Various sections of the releases can be assembled according to your specific situation and local circumstances. This kit has been prepared with the following assumptions:

- Users of the kit may or may not have experience in putting together press releases or dealing with the media generally. The kit was assembled assuming the user would be starting from scratch.
- Users may need maximum flexibility and guidance in assembling a news release for various situations. Thus, we have supplied several versions and made frequent use of brackets, signifying where information must be supplied to fit the specific location or situation.
- It is impossible to anticipate every possible event or situation which might bring with it the opportunity to publicize local or regional earthquake risks. The user ultimately will use this kit as a guide.

In contacting the local media, through a press release or other means, the following advice should be kept in mind:

- Make the information relevant to the newspaper's readers or the station's audience. Answer the question: "Why should they care?" The more relevant the concern, the more editors and news directors will pay attention and cover it.
- Make your case at the top of the release, and in the first sentence if possible. Give the editor or news director a reason to pay attention before going into details.
- Be prepared to move quickly. Everyone is paying more attention immediately after an event - such as a small earthquake locally or a large one somewhere else. But this opportunity to educate will fade very quickly. Be ready with a plan for what you can do when an earthquake occurs, and then be ready to move quickly. Do you have your local facts and risk assessment in hand? Have you identified someone who can speak knowledgeably to the media? The opportunity will fade within a couple of days, if not within hours.
- Keep your points simple, and stick to them.

A final note: To be effective with the news media, it is important to view your communication with reporters, editors, and news directors as an opportunity and not as a distraction or something to just get through. It can be easy to fall into the latter, thereby wasting a valuable opportunity to reach the public that may not come again.

Guide to Press Materials

Sample Press Release:

- Raise community awareness in the wake of a seismic event elsewhere
- Describe the local community's own risks and safety deficits
- Provide background on similar quake events and damage

Universal Press Release 1:

- Raise community awareness in the wake of a seismic event elsewhere
- Describe the local community's own risks and safety deficits
- Present solution in terms of seismic codes
- Detail actions planned to adopt seismic codes

Universal Press Release 2:

- Raise community awareness of seismic risks and safety deficits
- Present solution in terms of seismic codes

Letter to Local Editor or News Director:

- Raise community awareness of seismic risks and safety deficits
- Present solution in terms of seismic codes
- Key points and background information on related costs and importance of seismic codes

Sample Press Release

Emergency Service Disaster Agency
555 E. Main St.
Richter, IL
987-654-3210
Mailed x/x/x

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

RICHTER - They're still assessing the cost in Salt Lake City resulting from last Friday's devastating earthquake. The latest death toll stands at 250, and the current estimate of damage to buildings and infrastructure is between \$1 billion and \$2 billion.

It could have been much worse, however, and the city's experience holds a lesson for Richter, says Bill Bright, executive director of the local Emergency Services Disaster Agency.

Salt Lake City at least was anticipating a quake, and so had changed its building codes and taken other preparedness measures in recent years. Friday's magnitude 7.1 quake could have killed thousands if those actions had not been taken, he said.

Richter is not even aware of the earthquake risk it faces, and is not prepared, said Bright, who will hold an informational meeting about local earthquake risk and preparedness at 7 p.m. next Thursday, April 27, in the Richter Public Library, 514 E. Main.

Richter lies near an active fault zone and so can expect an earthquake, possibly as severe as the one that struck Salt Lake City, Bright said. Seismologists estimate there is a 25 percent chance that a severe quake - magnitude 6.5 or greater - will affect the southern Illinois region within the next 50 years.

The death toll from that quake will largely be determined by the quality of the buildings in the quake zone - and therefore by the quality of the building codes and enforcement that dictated how those buildings were constructed, Bright said.

A magnitude 7.2 quake in 1995 struck the center of Kobe, Japan, with severe shaking that caused even some well-designed buildings to collapse. But the greatest damage was to older buildings, built before the modern Japanese seismic building code. More than 5,000 people were killed, most of them in older homes built shortly after World War II, with little or no attention to seismic resistance.

Two California quakes of similar strength of recent years, Loma Prieta (San Francisco) and Northridge (Los Angeles), by contrast produced 62 and 57 deaths respectively. Those California communities were prepared for an earthquake, Bright said, having been building for more than 30 years according to building codes that can prevent or minimize seismic damage.

Since 1992, the three model building codes used in the United States have included practical and low-cost construction guidelines that can prevent or minimize seismic damage in new construction, Bright said. The cost of using them is minimal, they vary with the level of risk in each community, and already are being used for all federal government projects and for state-owned buildings in 37 states.

Richter, however, has yet to adopt one of these codes. It also lacks a fully-staffed building safety department that could enforce them. Unless actions are taken to change the situation, Richter may suffer the consequences, Bright said.

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"Universal" Press Release 1

[agency or gov't office]

[address]

[city, state, zip]

[phone]

Mailed x/x/x

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

[CITY, State from which you're sending the release] - The earthquake [two, three, four, etc.] days ago was in [Japan, California, Armenia, etc.], but it could have been here. [County/community] also sits near an active fault zone - a fault zone that could produce a quake at any time.

When a quake occurs, property and lives could be lost needlessly - because buildings were constructed without the benefit of the latest building code, says [local government or agency official].

To prepare for that eventuality, and reduce the potential for damage and loss of life, [state government office or agency] today launched a statewide campaign to raise awareness of the risk and educate local communities on what they can do to deal with it. The chief aim of the campaign, said [name], will be to inform local governments and residents of the benefits of adopting and enforcing the latest version of one of the three model building codes used in the United States.

Since 1992, each of the model codes has included practical and low-cost construction guidelines that can prevent or minimize seismic damage, he/she said. By adopting and enforcing the latest code for new construction, communities can begin to protect themselves against potential quake damage. Too few are doing that, he/she said.

[Might want to say something here about specific campaign plans.]

Among the issues to be addressed in the campaign: [Agenda for meeting]

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"Universal" Press Release 2

[agency or gov't office]

[address]

[city, state, zip]

[phone]

Mailed x/x/x

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

[CITY, State from which you're sending the release] - Buildings may collapse and lives may be lost when an earthquake rumbles through [county/community] sometime in the future. The damage doesn't have to happen.

[County/community] is in an earthquake zone, but it doesn't have the latest building code. That lays the groundwork for potential and unnecessary tragedy, says [local government or agency official].

When a quake occurs, property and lives could be lost needlessly - because buildings were constructed without the benefit of the latest building code, says [local government or agency official].

Since 1992, the three model building codes used in the United States have included practical and low-cost construction guidelines that can prevent or minimize seismic damage in new construction, [official] said. The cost of using them is minimal, they vary with the level of risk in each community, and already are being used for all federal government projects and for state-owned buildings in 37 states.

[City], however, has yet to adopt one of these codes. It also lacks a fully-staffed building safety department that could enforce them. Unless actions are taken to change the situation, [City] may suffer the consequences, [official] said.

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Sample Letter To The Editor

Dear Editor/News Director

[County/community] is in an earthquake zone, with a [number] percent chance of experiencing a damaging earthquake within the next [number] years. But are its buildings being constructed with that in mind? Has the local government adopted the latest building code, which includes practical and low-cost construction guidelines that can prevent or minimize seismic damage? And are local residents aware of the potential damage and loss of life that could be prevented if buildings are constructed using the latest code?

A magnitude 6.7 quake in Armenia in 1988 killed approximately 25,000. In part this was caused by poor building construction and an insufficient seismic building code. The same thing could happen here.

Two California quakes of similar strength of recent years, Loma Prieta (San Francisco) and Northridge (Los Angeles), by contrast produced 62 and 57 deaths respectively. Those California communities were prepared for an earthquake, having been building for more than 30 years according to building codes that can prevent or minimize seismic damage.

I'm writing to ask that you consider asking these questions in your community as the basis for a possible story. Since 1992, all three of the model building codes used in the United States have included seismic design provisions, but your local government [has not updated its code], [has never implemented a building code], or [is neglecting enforcement].

Since the threat of an earthquake often is thought of as something only in the distant future, local officials may underestimate voter support for taking actions that might reduce the potential for quake damage, or may be resisting it out of an unwarranted fear of the costs to developers or business. Voters may not be voicing support for taking action because they haven't been made aware of the importance of acting now.

Below are some key points related to earthquake mitigation and building codes. For further information, contact [the state office of....., at]

- **Why the building code is important.** In the 1995 earthquake in Kobe, Japan, older (pre-1971) buildings were *more than six times more likely* to be severely damaged than buildings constructed according to the latest seismic code. A 1988 earthquake in Armenia killed 25,000 people. But severe quakes near San Francisco in 1989 and near Los Angeles in 1994 killed only 62 and 57 respectively. The difference in the death toll resulted largely from the quality of buildings and codes in each area.
- **Cost.** The cost of using the seismic guidelines in the latest codes is minimal. They add an average of 2.1 percent to total building costs across all types of construction, and only 0.7 percent for low-rise residential, according to the Building Seismic Safety Council, a nonprofit organization of engineering and construction groups.
- **Level of need.** Seismic codes take into account the level of risk in each community. If a community's risk is low, the code reflects that. Having a seismic code doesn't mean you build to San Francisco standards.
- **Who is using seismic building codes.** They already are required for federal government construction projects, for state-owned buildings in 37 states, and are being more widely used by all levels of government. The three model codes, on which most local building codes are based, now include seismic codes. More communities are using them, making those communities safer.
- **Insurance cost.** The insurance industry is implementing a system of building-code enforcement ratings, which include the new seismic requirements, much like those used to rate local fire protection. Communities that do not incorporate seismic codes for new construction may be rated as having a higher risk, thus bringing higher insurance costs to residents.

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